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Multipart Phenomena in Hungarian Folk Music Regarding the Instrumentation and Instrumentalization of Sound

Abstract

„We are a monophonic nation proof of it is our whole folk music. But the sense of that seemed to have skewed the angle from which we were looking at our whole musical heritage." Benjamin Rajeczky's starting words from his 1972 essay „Relics of our multipart music from the first half of the 15th century", in which stated „It turned out that this music wasn't exclusively monophonic, as we overemphasized previously."

The presentation is focused on vocal music, as it went through a lot of changes during the 20th century in the relation of monophonic and polyphonic music, compared to the previous ages. There were especially huge changes amongst the music of those Hungarians who became minorities due to the new borders drawn after World War I and II. Since then, this phenomenon has become much more robust with the number of Hungarian tongued school decreasing and thus younger generations growing up getting a deeper knowledge of their countries' culture. One of the visible effects of these changes are the appearance of Slovakian and Slovenian multipart singing in the folk music and performance of given villages and given music genres.

The newest symptoms do not belong to the whole phenomenon as the new ones are specifically in relation with the much stronger relations and affects of the folk music of other nations. Good examples are collections of the same tunes from different ages, of the same villages, with the old version being monophonic and the new one polyphonic.
However, the multipart musical symptoms of this new era that we can observe in the vocal folk music of today's Hungarian minorities are only isolated, local phenomenons, not affecting the whole of Hungarian folk music.

Introduction

"We are a monophonic nation – our entire folk music is proof of it this. But sensing that seemed to have skewed the angle from which we were looking at our entire musical heritage." (*Egyszólamú nép vagyunk, bizonyság rá egész népzenénk. De ennek tudata mintha ferdített volna valamit azon a látószögön, melyen át zenei múltunkat szemléltük.*) (Rajeczky 1976, 151). This is the first phrase of Benjamin Rajeczky's study "Relics of our multipart music from the first half of the 15th century", in which he discussed the newly found exemplars of multipart music in medieval Hungarian music.
Rajeczky's research, which was based on medieval multipart samples, refined our view of folk music and art music from a historic perspective. He stated: "It turned out that this music wasn't exclusively monophonic, as we overemphasized previously. Even Kodály propagated that Hungarians are a monophonic nation, and our musical history is also a monophonic one. (*Kiderül, hogy ez a muzsika egyáltalán nem volt kizárólagosan egyszólamú, mint azt azelőtt túlhangsúlyoztuk. Még Kodály is hajlandó volt szentenciaszerűen kimondani, hogy a magyar egyszólamú nép, és hogy zenetörténetünk is egyszólamú zenetörténet.*) (Rajeczky 1985, 151)

Kodály noted in 1919: “A musically immature person does not even hear harmony, only some buzzing, which is not disturbing. But it disturbs even the poorly educated person who only knows and understands a few patterns, and if anything different comes up, he is irritated. (*Zeneileg fejletlen ember nem is hallja a harmóniát, csak valami zúgást, ami azonban nem zavarja. De zavarja a zeneileg már félig műveltet, aki bizonyos sablonokat már ismer, megért, ami attól eltér, azon fennakad.*) (Kodály 1991, 66)

I observed the same phenomenon as a young researcher in the 1970s, when old zither (*citera* in Hungarian) players used to play untuned zithers. In the Great Plains region I tuned the instrument of a zither player (Tari 1974), who then got very upset with me. He said I had ruined his good instrument.
Bartók approached the question from the aspect of an educated musician when he wrote about monophony:

“...it is remarkable how an average musician cannot comprehend either the music of the peasantry or the compex world of moder doscords. For him a simple old peasant tune sounds intolerably modern, because he doesn’t hear the regular and comfortable tonic-dominant changing of the major and minor scales, and only hears dorian, lydian-mixolydian and other strange scales. And all of that is accompanied by the freest rhythm possible... That is very hard to understand!		*...figyelemreméltó, hogy az átlagos zenész éppúgy nem érti meg az igazi parasztzenét, mint amennyire a modern disszonanciák bonyolult világát sem. Számára egy egyszerű régi parasztdallam elviselhetetlenül modernnek hangzik, mert nem csengenek a fülébe a dúr és moll skálák kényelmes és megszokott tonika-domináns váltakozásai, hanem dór, líd, mixolíd és egyéb különös.... hangsorokat hall. És mindehhez még a legszabadabb ritmika járul... Ezt bizony nehéz megérteni!* (Bartók 1966, Notes 834).

Things have changed a lot today. Since about the last two decades of the 20th century, we have hardly been able to find anybody playing an untuned instrument. In the case of the zither, this is even more obvious, as in addition to solo playing, *citera* bands have become common and several instrument-makers create different types of zither (Figure 1-2) with great imagination.

I. Heritage of a Bygone Age: Monophonic Songs as the Basis of Instrumental Melodies

It is a well-known fact that Hungarian folk music is basically monophonic, especially in terms of vocal music. Besides monophony, however, different signs of the multipart phenomenon are visible and audible in Hungarian folk music as well. A part of this is connected with instrumental music.

In Hungarian instrumental folk music and the broader field of traditional music (the narrower field in this context would be peasant music and urban music which has partly been passed on orally), it is also characteristic that most instrumental melodies are based on songs. Kodály was the first one to answer the question: “What peasants play on their instruments? Songs, for the most part, dressed up in instrumental form. These include pieces performed without text, but with a construction and style which most likely originated from songs.” (Kodály 1960, 118).

It is a proven fact that the setup of every single instrument gives a different sound to the song. It is thus almost inevitable that the performance of folk songs on any instrument results in another variant – which is suited to the instrument and of course to the regional musical style and the player – of the characteristic performance style. The performance of a string ensemble of two to three or five to six members results in a new instrumentalised multipart variant and genre (for example dance music). But in the case of the instrumentalization of sound, this is not

only a question of changing from vocal to instrumental music, but also a question of synchronous act of musical creation and of the music style. Examining the rhythms in the dance function of the Euro-Asiatic diatonic lament style, László Dobszay stated that instrumental forms show a vast diversity of variations, which break the boundaries of the whole type. (see Dobszay 1983, 296-310.)

The following two recordings (A 42 and A 43) belong on the one hand to the diatonical lament-style layer belongs on the one hand to the diatonical lament style layer of old style, while on the other hand they are cases related to vocal-instrumental music phenomena of the instrumentation of sound. (see Tari 2012). A variant of the song was collected by Béla Bartók in 1914 among the ethnic group of the *székely* in Transylvania (Bartók 1914 in Tari 2012, 220). The following folk recording (see Corpus Musicae Popularis Hungaricae X 1997 Type: CVIII. no. 363-420 and A 42) comes from another geographical area, namely from Kalotaszeg (Ţara Călatei in Romania today). The following description by Bálint Sárosi is important in order to be able to understand the particular nature of this place:

> "Kalotaszeg lies south-east of the Szilágyság, between and on both sides of the main road and the railway connecting Transylvania with Hungary, and extends by and large from the Bihar Mountains to Kolozsvár (now Napoca-Cluj). Its Hungarian population attracts attention by its traditionally sophisticated architecture, homespun cloths, artistic embroidery and, most of all, by its splendid traditional costumes." (Sárosi 2012, 73.)

The above-mentioned song is a lyrical poem called *De szeretnék az egen csillag lenni* (I Would Like to Be a Star in the Sky). The following instrumentation of the melody (see **CD 2**) was played in the same region by a string band. The ensemble played a slow *csárdás*, the representative national dance that arose during the course of the 19th century.[1]

I. Instrumentalized Song Melodies as Dance Tunes: the Freedom of the Structure

A free structure which started to emerge at the end of the 20th century (Tari 1985) and was called *jaj-nóta* (the "oh" song, according to *ad hoc* terminology) by Zoltán Kodály, is a good example for the topic of instrumentalisation and vocalisation. This is nowadays called the group of expanded line-structure melodies (Szenik 1999). Some melodies of this type and comments on them can be found in the collection of János Seprődi from 1897 (Almási, Benkő, Lakatos 1974, notes on the instrumental melodies nos. 93, 96, 101).[2] On A 44 there is an instrumental variant of his transcription no. 93, a pair dance called *Jártatós* (a running dance, a type of slow csárdás). In this case the dance melody with tempo giusto-character was vocalised and used as folk song as well. Due to content of the poem from folk poetry (beginning of the verse: *Most szép lenni katonának/Mert Kossuthnak verbuválnak…* It is nice to be a soldier now/When the recruiting is made for Kossuth), the melody is linked to the revolution and the war of independence in 1848-49 (see Tari 1998, musical example 25, variants: 26-29). In this manner we can speak of an "off-instrumentation" of the sound (see Huber [no year] and Tari 1998, musical example 29).

[1] For more about the national pair dance see Pesovár 1985.
[2] For Seprődi see Almási 2003.

After a field trip to Transylvania in 1912, Kodály recognized that a good performer could mimic the accompaniment in a solo violin performance. The fiddler who is mentioned by Kodály was the only musician in the village. (Kodály 1960, 112)[3]

II. Between Vocalisation and Instrumentalisation: Whistled Vocal and Instrumental Melodies as the Imitation of Instruments

A special type of the instrumentalisation of sound occurs when the song is sung or whistled. This originally came from the absence of a musical instrument (see Tari 2011, audio examples 18-01-13 and the vocalised imitations of instruments on pages 262 and 265). Whistled melodies were performed exclusively by men, and moreover by the best singers and dancers. In the above mentioned town of Kalotaszeg, where the following recording was made, whistling is a special "instrumental" performance style (see A 45). The original "simple" (monophonic) folk song is widespread in the north-eastern borderland of Hungary (see A 46). Its melody is often played by string bands of Hungarians in Hungary and in Romania.

The character of the melody and the tempo of the performance are different in comparison to the song, but the Dorian scale and the cadences show the shared identity of the type and style (see A 47).

III. Old and New Side by Side: the Usage of Heterophony and Third-Interval Parallelism

Especially during the 20th century, many changes occurred in terms of the relationship between monophonic and multipart music compared to previous times, which was partly connected with the instrumentation and instrumentalisation of sound. Perhaps the most significant change came about in instrumental dance music, where solo performance was taken over by bands with several members. At the performance of a band, multipart music is resembled, for example, by the unison tune being performed in parallel octaves. Such phenomena can be observed especially in Western Transylvania, in the former Kolozs County (respectively Cluj-Napoca in Romania today). One example is the *Öreges lassú* [An old slow dance] from Bonchida (Bonţida in Kolozs County) performed by a four-member band, primas Sándor Pusztai (born 1895), recorded by Zoltán Kallós and Ferenc Béres in 1964 (see www.zti.hu/index.phpo/hu database/published recordings AP 7383b1). We can also observe parallelism in thirds in instrumental music as well, particularly between the Danube and Tisza rivers.

One example in this case is "Szögény csárdás" [A Poor Csárdás Dance] from Foktő (Pest County) played by a three member band, primas Gyula Zsiga (born 1902) recorded by György Martin, Jolán Borbély and Eszter Berkes in 1961 (see www.zti.hu/index/php/hu/published recordings AP 9984f).

A third-interval parallelism of this kind, which is evidenced in urban instrumental music and urban dance music, had left vocal music and peasant instrumental music unaffected for a long time. Modern third-interval parallelism did, however, leave its mark on Hungarians who became minorities after the First and Second World War (see Tari 1999a, 1999b, 1998). At this point we arrive at the topic of influences on the musical practices of Hungarian minorities.

[3] See also the transcriptions from a phonograph cylinder in Tari 2001, Multipart music in the solo violin, 113-115 and 121-131.

IV. Modern Phenomena: Influences from the Neighbours

Habitual changes amongst Hungarians minorities were not induced by migration, but by the fact that they were segregated from the motherland, and also because they were affected by the changes happening within the culture of their new countries, topped by radio and television. This process occurred in different territories at different times, and reached its height around the 1980s and 1990s. The appearance of the modern media and the disappearance of or reduction in the number of Hungarian language schools, leading to a deeper knowledge of their new country's culture, resulted in the loss of Hungarian traditions and to some extent a greater orientation towards the new country's folk music. In the Hungarian villages in the new country, the earlier instrumental ensembles quickly disappeared, and for most of the people almost only singing in church remained. The result of this process is the Slovakian, Ukrainian and Slovenian multipart singing effect shown in the style of folk songs and performances of certain villages.

Among the Hungarian minority in Ukraine, new style folk songs were recorded by two men in 1989 in Visk (Viskovce). They claimed to have sung like this since their youth. They said it wasn't good enough "if there weren't two sounds" (in dialect: „Ha nem vót meg a két hang.") They compensated for the absence of instrumental accompaniment with diaphonic singing. The vocal melody was first collected among the *székely* (Latin *siculi*) ethnic group in Transylvania, in the same territory where it is still popular among flute players as well (see Figure 3 and A 47, A 48).

Today, the village of Magyarbőd/Bidovce in Slovakia is known mainly for its dances due to the guest performances of the local dance group in Hungary. The village is also considered to be a place where multipart music is native. That, however, is not true. Ethnomusicologists have been visiting the village since the late 1960s, and I collected music there in 1994 (see TARI 2010, musical examples CD II, 47-54). Those present at the recordings were mostly women of traditional groups, some of them still wearing traditional costumes. They were singing happily and joyfully. Sometimes a couple of men joined in as well, and the women also danced to their own singing (Figures 4 and 5).

It is significant that there were barely any signs of traces of multipart music in previous collections from the village. However, the 25 years that passed before I arrived on a field trip was enough time to allow serious changes in the musical heritage of the village to take place. By that time, multipart singing was prevalent and common in many tunes because of the influence of the latest music of the Slovakians and the nearby Ruthenians. The singing of these women was also a good example of which songs became multipart and which remained original.

A unique place in their performances was taken up by the popular art song which is known from the folk play *A szökött színész és katona* (The Escaped Actor and Soldier) by Szigligeti Ede, first staged in 1844 with music to accompany the first performance of *Magasan repül a daru* (*The Crane Flies High*) by Egressy Benjamin. Another contemporary poem is *Hótól fehér a gyöngyösi temető* (The Cemetery of the Town of Gyöngyös is White with Snow) (see TARI 1998a, musical example 96).

This then-famous song was also used by Franz Liszt as the first theme for his Hungarian Rhapsody No. 14. (Kerényi 1963, 211., Tari 2013, 108.) The popular art song was folklorised and diffused in peasant folk music and is known until today in different regions (A 50 and A 51, see Tari 1998, musical example 96). In the performance of the women from Magyarbőd we can hear that the first line is always monophonic, sometimes started by an ad-hoc pre-singer, and the continuation of the four-line verse is sung in several musical parts (see A 52).

V. Interferences with the Tradition: the Influence of Poliphonic Ecclesiastical Songs on Profane Vocal Music

In the 1970s, ethnomusicologists discovered a unique form of multipart singing in the Transylvanian village of Csávás (earlier Szászcsávás) which is Ceuaş in Romania today. This practice could be traced back to 18th century art music. Even though the polyphony of western art music and the so-called "tenor-praxis" of Claude Goudimel from the 16th century was originally very distant from the education of the Hungarian communities, it had a special effect on this Calvinist Hungarian village in Transylvania. Here, church songs and some worldly songs are sung in this kind of multipart music and at the same time adorned with a style that can be traced back to 18th century harmonised singing. The multipart song practice of Calvinistic colleges in the late 18th century is a speciality in Hungary. A funeral song from a Gregorian chant song-book from 1807 (*Elvégeztük immár* p*álya futásunkat – We have finished our course of life,* see Szabó 2001) can be heard on A 53.

In addition to church songs, secular songs also absorbed elements of multipart music in Szászcsávás. One secular song from the 17th century, with some signs of harmonization from the 18th century, was kept alive through oral tradition as can be heard on A 54. This process is connected with the instrumentalisation of folk songs as well, especially by the genre of a slow, mildly asymmetric music designated as *Asztali nóta* (song on the table, see A 55).

VI. Summary

Benjamin Rajeczky highlighted randomly evolving multipart music phenomena in Hungarian folk music that originated from different shapings of the same tune. We can find numerous examples even today for heterophony, and other old phenomena, but the above-mentioned newer phenomena do not belong there, as they are specifically the result of the effects of closer and stronger encounters with music of other ethnic communities which are majorities in their respective countries. A good example of this are the same tunes collected in the same village, but sung in monophony in earlier times and in part in later recordings.

The newest vocal multipart music practices of Hungarian minorities in countries surrounding Hungary are isolated local phenomena today, with no effect on local practices in Hungary. Looking at the big picture of multipart music, however, we can assess that the actual usage and application of multipart music is carried out on different levels and locations simultaneously, and can only be examined when taking the entirety of folk music into consideration.

The instrumentation and instrumentalization of sound and multipart music come together in part; at least this is the case in Hungarian folk music. In everyday practice, folk songs have been subjected to instrumentation/instrumentalisation by being performed by instrumental bands. This is a direct continuation of the tradition. At the same time, new phenomena have occurred in the musical practices of Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries. In the 20th century, and particularly after the 1970s, folk (and other) music influenced – primarily through the media – the singing of Hungarian minorities: the originally monophonic folk songs obtained multipart elements. This new structure offers new possibilities for their instrumentation.

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Figures

Figure 1.

„Bereg" citeraegyüttes Tarpa [„Bereg" zitherband from Tarpa, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County] in Budapest on the memorial day of the componist Vass, Lajos 10. April 2006. Photograph by Lujza Tari.

Figure 2.

Members in a competition of zithermakers (Hung.: *citerakészítők*) in Szigetszentmiklós (Pest County)10. September 2004. Photograph by Lujza Tari.

Figure 3.

Józsa, Lajos (b. 1932) flute player – in the civil life potter in the famous transylvanian pottery village Korond [Corund, today in Romania] August 1997. Photograph by Gábor Miháltz.

Figure 4.

Members of the traditional singing and dancing group in Magyarbőd [Bidovce, today Slovakia] 2. December 1994. Photograph by Lujza Tari.

Figure 5.

Members of the traditional singing and dancing group in Magyarbőd [Bidovce, today Slovakia] 2. December 1994. Photograph by Lujza Tari.